DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 402 EA 030 608

AUTHOR Dorfman, Diane
TITLE Talking Community: The Dialogue Workbook. Strengthening Community Education: The Basis for Sustainable Renewal.
INSTITUTION Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR, Rural Education Program.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 41p.; Adapted from "Linking Rural Schools and Communities for Sustainable Change: Where do We Begin?"
CONTRACT RJ6006501
AVAILABLE FROM Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Document Reproduction Service, 101 SW Main, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204-3297; Tel: 800-547-6339, ext. 519 (Toll free); Web site: http://www.nwrel.org; e-mail: products@nwrel.org.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; *Community Education; Elementary Secondary Education; Group Discussion; *Interpersonal Communication; *Verbal Communication; Workbooks
IDENTIFIERS Dialogue Analysis

ABSTRACT

This workbook explores ways to improve dialogue so as to enhance communication and self-knowledge. The text is divided into 7 chapters. Chapter 1 opens by asking the reader to describe what "talk" is and to relate conversations the reader had during the past week. It offers exercises on listening, and on understanding the context of conversations, and it underscores the need to suspend judgment while listening to someone. The next chapter looks at the dynamics when two or more people are talking and lists some of the factors that facilitate collaboration, such as learning to listen as an ally and granting others the respect of being an authority about their own thoughts and feelings. Chapters 3 and 4 delve deeper into the purpose of dialogue and its essential components, focusing on dialogue as a way of connecting with people rather than as a tool for convincing others to believe in a certain way. Chapter 5 discusses the different stages of dialogue: (1) invitation and initiation; (2) instability and conflict; (3) suspension; and (4) collective exploration. This chapter also outlines the roles of the facilitator and the participants. Chapter 6 lists strategies for when dialogue fails, and the concluding chapter offers tips for starting a dialogue. An appendix provides information on three dialogue centers (organizations which promote community dialogue). (Contains 12 references.) (RJM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 445 402

Strengthening Community Education:
The Basis for Sustainable Renewal

TALKING COMMUNITY: THE DIALOGUE WORKBOOK

EA 030608

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Northwest Regional
Educational Laboratory
Rural Education Program

Strengthening Community Education: The Basis for Sustainable Renewal
Talking Community: The Dialogue Workbook

by Diane Dorfman

Adapted from
Linking Rural Schools and Communities for Sustainable Change: Where Do We Begin?

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Rural Education Program
Joyce Ley, Director

1-800-547-6339, ext. 561
Fax: 503-275-0654
www.nwrel.org/ruraled/

Illustrations: Art Parts™
Design: Gambee Hammons Creative
Production: Denise Crabtree

Permission to reproduce in whole or part for use in educational and other nonprofit groups is granted with the acknowledgment of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory as the source on all copies.

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract number RJ6006501. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U.S. government.

© Copyright 2000 by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Strengthening Community Education:

· The Basis for Sustainable Renewal

TALKING COMMUNITY: THE DIALOGUE WORKBOOK

by Diane Dorfman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: There's Talk and Then There's Talk 2

Listening 6

Listening and Talk 7

Chapter 2: You, Them, and Us 10

You and Everyone 10

Dialogue 11

Chapter 3: Dialogue's Outcomes Versus "Goals" 13

Talk that Changes the World 13

Chapter 4: Dialogue Essentials 14

Content and/or Relationships 14

Chapter 5: Stages of Dialogue 20

The Role of the Facilitator 22

The Role of the Participants 23

Chapter 6: When Dialogue Does Not Work 25

Why Dialogues Fail 26

Obstacles to Daily Dialogue 27

Chapter 7: Where Do We Start? 28

Appendix: Dialogue Centers 32

Study Circles 32

Kettering Foundation 33

National Issues Forum (NIF) 34

References 35

Ordering Publications from NWREL 36

INTRODUCTION

This workbook is about dialogue. Dialogue is more than a conversation among people. Dialogues encourage learning, discussion, listening, and speaking. We will look closely at all that is involved in talking to people and discover a way to learn about each other and ourselves. Learning about each other and ourselves builds a foundation for relationships, knowledge, and strong communities. As we are learning, we are also talking about issues that concern us and hearing our neighbors' views. Dialogue works through the strategy of respectful, nonjudgmental speaking and listening to provoke and clarify our own thinking. It connects our thoughts and selves to the group engaged in dialogue. When we learn and think together about issues, we are coming together in ways that build the foundation of community. That is our goal in introducing dialogue in this workbook: Dialogue is a strategy for community building.

Dialogues begin with a few people discussing an issue of local concern. Structured dialogues are organized by several groups including Study Circles and the Kettering Foundation (see Appendix). In this workbook, we look at how we can begin dialogues in our own communities by first examining the ways in which we talk to one another.

We consider the relationship between "talk" and community: How does talking build relations? How do we talk about community or community issues? What kinds of talk build communities?

These are some of the things we work through together in this book. As you learn more about what dialogue is, you are learning how to initiate and participate in dialogues. You can begin to talk among friends, neighbors, co-workers, or fellow members of your bowling league, church, or PTA. You can decide what you need to talk about when you realize how talk can change what you think, what your neighbors think, and what all of you do.

I. THERE'S TALK AND THEN THERE'S TALK

We can start by looking at "talk." What is it? Is it all the same? What do we do when we talk to each other? What effect does it have on the people engaged in it?

List four different kinds of talk and briefly describe them:

1

2

3

4

In the last week, did you talk to someone you hadn't met before? A neighbor? A fellow bus rider? What did you talk about?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What kind of conversation would you say you had? (Introductory? Friendly? Awkward?)

How is this conversation different from one you have with a neighbor you've known and spoken with for a long time?

Is the content of these conversations different? How about the tone? Frequency? Does it lead to anything, such as a plan to meet again, consult someone else, or … what?

Compare conversations with a neighbor you meet for the first time, a neighbor you've known for a long time, an old friend, a co-worker, and a relative. Fill in the table on the next page and think about what different kinds of talk and different kinds of people commonly come together in your life.

Differences among these conversations are part of why what we say and the way we say it make things happen. You make friends with welcoming words, initiate projects with "office talk," and soothe a weary pal with caring tones. Words are actions; talk is what the philosopher John Searle calls "speech acts."

With all the different kinds of talk, and the impact talk has, what role does talking play in communities? Choose two kinds of talk from the previous table and think about whether your conversations could affect the wider community in any way.

1

2

Different Kinds of Talk

	New Neighbor	Old Neighbor	Relative	Friend	Co-worker
Type of Conversation					
Tone					
Issues Discussed					
Outcome					
Follow-up					

Getting to know people around you is one way to start building connections, and this could strengthen a community. How is "getting to know someone" different from discussions you have on local issues? Think about the kinds of talk you might have in a community meeting. Let's say there is an issue on the table to build a new public transportation line through your part of town. You are for the proposal. How would you speak in the meeting?

Did you describe a way of speaking that might be called "debate?" Were you concerned about presenting your reasoned arguments to people who oppose your view and convincing them that they are wrong and you are right? Is this kind of "debate" different from relationship building or "getting-to-know-you" kinds of talk? How so or how not?

Listening

While you may or may not find the kinds of talk different, there is another aspect of talk that should be considered. Listening. What did the people who oppose the proposal say? Can you hear their arguments? One influence on how you talk is the topic at hand, but how you listen is also an influence.

In those situations you put in the previous table, or in general "relationship building talk," how did listening fit into the conversations? Was what you heard

as important ...

less important ...

equally important ...

as what you said?

When getting to know someone, you may listen more closely to learn something from what they say about themselves. Think about what people opposing you on the transportation proposal might say.

11

What do you do with these arguments? Are you hearing them and simultaneously formulating a response (refuting what you hear)? Are you hearing only what you need to reinforce what you already know (i.e., what you believe to be people's erroneous views on why the proposal is not good)? This type of speaking and listening is different from what occurs when you are with a neighbor or friend. What is different? Is more at stake? Are you and your ability to win the argument at stake, or is the fate of the transportation system more important? Sometimes it may be hard to tell.

When you talk to a friend or neighbor, do you also sometimes want to get your point across and change the way the person you are chatting with is thinking or acting? How does that affect what you hear a friend say?

Listening is a key component of dialogue precisely because of the difference between the "debate" you might have where you speak to prove your point and the listening you do to learn about someone else. Next time you find yourself starting to "debate" or argue with someone, tell yourself to stop arguing. When the other person makes a point, rephrase it in your own words, then reply.

Try this and see if the pace of the debate slows down. Does the tension level diminish? Chances are if you listen well enough to put the other person's arguments into your own words, that person will feel he or she is really being heard. Your listening becomes more accurate. You are not listening to agree but to ensure clarity and respect.

When all participants in the conversation or dialogue talk and listen, they may change each other's views or their own.

Listening and Talk

How does what you hear affect what you say? If talking does change or influence your listening, how does your listening affect your talk? How do you speak to a person to whom you pay close attention differently than one to whom you pay no attention?

RESPECT

FOCUS

REGARD

You may have listed one of the above to characterize a conversation in which you listen carefully. When you listen, you show respect and regard for the speaker and his or her ideas. You focus your thoughts, attention—even your body—on the person speaking. Such attention and focus can affect the person speaking. If they feel their words are being attended to, they may want to be sure they are saying something worth the attention. They may also consider the person to whom they are speaking and suit their words to what they know about their listener.

Think about conversations you've had with someone looking you right in the eye or nodding and verbally affirming what you say (or shaking his or her head); compare that to someone looking at his or her watch or sighing and looking off in the distance. What impact do these two "listening styles" have on your talk?

The effect a listener's focus and respect might have on your thoughts as speaker is important, but so is the effect listening has on you when you do it. Can your thoughts or ideas remain closed and unaffected once you really hear another's views? If you are there to persuade others that your view is best or right, you will speak and listen in a particular way. How would you speak or listen if you were there for a different purpose, say, to simply hear what everyone has to say?

Does one of the things you might do concern questioning? Would you be more likely to inquire about others' views on a subject, that is, ask questions rather than make statements? What happens when you become a learner as opposed to a persuader?

As a learner, you turn other people into ones with knowledge. You recognize their expertise; you value and respect them and what they have to offer. What happens in your mind when you hear all this? What happens to the people you talk to when they feel their thoughts are valued?

If you are not listening in order to argue against someone, you are also not deciding whether everything they say is right or wrong. What is right or wrong? Is right what agrees with you and wrong what does not? If you judge what someone says, you are not really hearing everything they say; you are listening and commenting simultaneously. You compartmentalize the speaker, and once he or she is in that compartment, you hear only what the compartment says, not what the person is saying. All the work and noise of judging may make you miss important information and draw mistaken conclusions about the speaker's ideas. In any event, the ideas are not considered or engaged—they are simply dismissed by your fixed views.

What if you suspended judgment and just listened?

Suspend Judgment

Listening and learning, all that we looked at above, require that we suspend judgment. In order to hear what another person is saying, we must stop simultaneously listening and judging or responding to what we hear. If we want to listen in order to learn, we cannot judge what we hear. Suspending judgment is one of the critical components of dialogue. The learning experience of a dialogue is what enables us, after informative discussions, to make informed, constructive judgments.

II. YOU, THEM, AND US

When two or more people speak, it is not just an exchange of words. It is a whole encounter among speakers. When you speak to others, it affects you: at the very least, your thoughts are no longer contained inside your head. You try to affect others by persuading them to see your point of view, getting them to like you, or making them listen.

Listening, talking, and conversing can affect what we think and who we are. Talking and listening in ways that transform our thoughts and heighten the connections among people are what make conversations become dialogue.

Your internal thought processes are influenced at the same time your participation is influencing other people's thoughts. You create a connection or relationship that did not exist before. Continuous mutual influences push the conversation on and link your thoughts and ideas more closely with others'.

You and Everyone

As we saw previously, there are obstacles to the kind of mutual influences that some kinds of talking and listening enable. Probing further into ways in which we speak and listen, let's think about what we do in conversations that encourage, rather than hinder, mutual influencing.

Think about yourself in relation to several people who have come together to discuss an issue. You are a collection of individuals. Some people in the room may agree with your view on the issue; others may not. What is your purpose in participating in the discussion?

As people listen to, learn from, and inform one another, they participate in a process that embodies the following:

- Collective inquiry
- Mutual discovery
- New personal and group understanding

What can happen, as you are learning and listening together? If your thoughts are affected by what you hear, your conversation partner's thoughts would also be affected. Not only do you each change your own minds, but the new thoughts are the result of the interaction between you. A new understanding is reached that is not the result of you or the other speaker/listener(s) alone, but of your mutual involvement.

This is dialogue.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Dialogue

Brown (1995) has learned key ways that dialogue enhances the capacity of individuals to work together as a collaborative team:

- Learning to listen as an ally, listening for collective group and individual understanding
- Increasing our skills of inquiry by asking questions from a place of "genuine not knowing"
- Allowing the time and space to finish a thought
- Allowing for thoughts in real time that are fresh, passionate, and alive
- Finding value in time to think and reflect
- Granting others the respect of being an authority about their own thoughts and feelings
- Noticing our own internal responses without needing to actually respond
- Building an "open space" where the consideration of diverse perspectives can build a "powerful mosaic of common understanding"
- Learning to be provoked without closing down and to consider the ideas that provoke us as well as those that echo our own interests
- Learning to listen deeply without the urge to fix, counter, or argue

- Noticing the nature of our own thinking
- Developing the capacity to move into difficult issues without becoming "hooked" into them

What do you see in that list that tells you something unique about dialogue?

All the differences among dialogue and other kinds of talk are significant. Below is a comparison of dialogue and discussion:

Dialogue

- Builds common understanding because it allows us to see the hidden meanings in our own communications
- Requires a suspension of judgment to work
- Enables the building of collective or shared meaning

Discussion

- Can grow from disagreement and lack of understanding
- Often leads to positions of advocacy, competition, and efforts to convince others of what is correct
- Is always about some specific issue, problem, or solution

One way to look at the difference is to think of the outcome. Discussions can maintain two separate views. Dialogues work to create interconnections in thoughts, ideas, and understandings. They aim to forge connections and unity among individuals.

When you are thinking, speaking, and listening to others, transformations occur at several different levels. The transformation in your own thought is mirrored in the transformation in your dialogue partner's thought. Significantly, when people's ideas change through this kind of nonjudgmental interaction, the change cannot affect individuals alone. The changes link the individuals with bonds that are strong and sustainable. A tightly connected group is formed that can produce amazing results, with all their energies pooled together. For Bohm and Peat (1991), dialogue has the potential to transform a collection of individuals holding diverse opinions and beliefs into a cohesive group sharing a common pool of knowledge and meaning. Such a transformation creates a capacity for groups and organizations to learn together.

III. DIALOGUE'S OUTCOMES VERSUS "GOALS"

Talk that Changes the World

Is there a separate kind of talk that changes things? Didn't we agree that listening to your friend's sorrow or greeting a neighbor has "real" results? Connecting with a neighbor creates ties within a place that can transform it from an urban wasteland to a village. Without forcing an opinion or "making a point," you have really had an effect on another person.

Dialogue is different from other kinds of talk that affect you and the world around you; the premises on which it is based are specific and important differences.

Look at the following list of some particular attributes of dialogue.

There are two key aspects to talk that we have been discussing here. We have been focusing more on how talk affects the people talking and listening and less on the content of the talk—what people talk about. Dialogue approaches talk in a particular way so that important ties and relationships develop, but it also is designed to ensure that everyone has a chance to voice his or her opinions on important issues.

While we are talking and listening we are learning important things about the issue, as well as the people with whom we are talking. Instead of believing we had all the answers to begin with, we open our minds to all sides and become informed and connected with the informers.

DIALOGUE

Emphasizes natural flow of conversation and ideas

Emphasizes whole-group learning

Can be used with any size group

Individual work is internal; examining one's own assumptions in relation to the topic under discussion

Length and frequency of meetings tend to be flexible and of low interpersonal intensity

Focuses on thinking process and how we arrive at our assumptions/beliefs—What is my position on that idea and how did I come to believe it?

Seeks to give us new insight into how we think and use language to express our beliefs, which leads toward shared understanding and a "common" thinking process

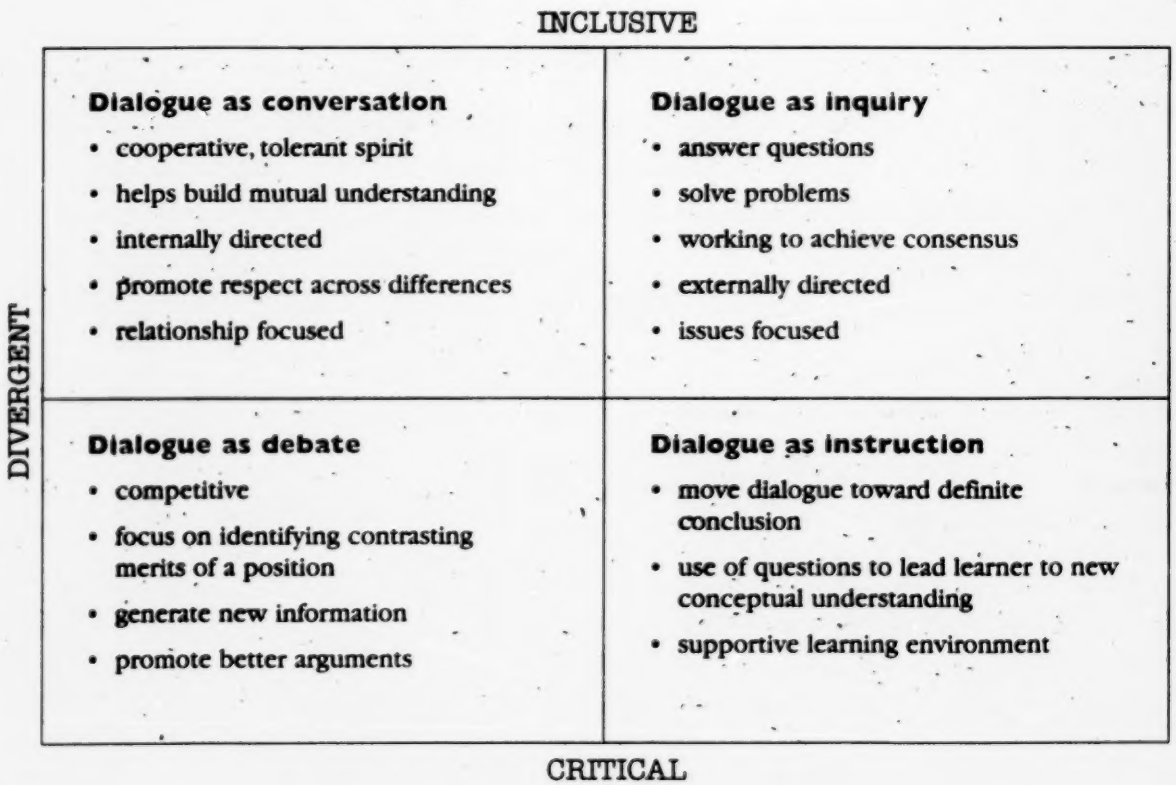
IV. DIALOGUE ESSENTIALS

Suspension of judgment and listening—these are important, but what does dialogue achieve? Transformations of people and groups; the creation of a foundation for continued work as a strongly bonded community. Is who is talking or what is being talked about more important?

Content and/or Relationship

We have spoken here of the possible and common "outcomes" of dialogue as opposed to its goals. This language is intentional because specific goals such as are effected by ballot measures or signature campaigns are not what is intended by dialogue.

Dialogue may serve different purposes depending on the context and participants' expectations. Some of these purposes may have more to do with the content or information being discussed, while another purpose may be developing relationships and getting to know the people in the community. Often, both purposes may be served at the same time.



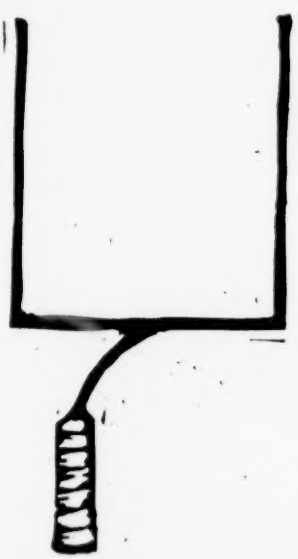
The Purpose Served by Different Types of Dialogue

Purpose	Relationship-Knowledge Structure	Role of Participant	Type of Dialogue
Build understanding and relations	Inclusive-Divergent	Equal status, reciprocal roles	Conversation
Solve problems	Inclusive-Convergent	Same	Inquiry
Understand different arguments and positions	Critical-Divergent	Same	Debate
Conceptual growth of novice	Critical-Convergent	Unequal, expert, and novice	Instruction

Sometimes dialogue has what is in effect an intended goal. Where individuals come together to think, discuss, and reflect on a specific topic or issue in order to make decisions about emerging choices, dialogue is goal-oriented. For example, a school staff may come together with representatives of various community groups to talk about how students might learn through community service opportunities.

In other cases, dialogue may have no clearly defined goal. Participants may not know exactly where they are heading or how the dialogue will be meaningful. They may have come together to explore and discuss the purpose of schooling or what it means to live well in a rural community. Unlike the goal of identifying ways students can learn in the community, the focus on "purpose" or on "living well" has no intended or expected result except to gain individual and group knowledge and insight.

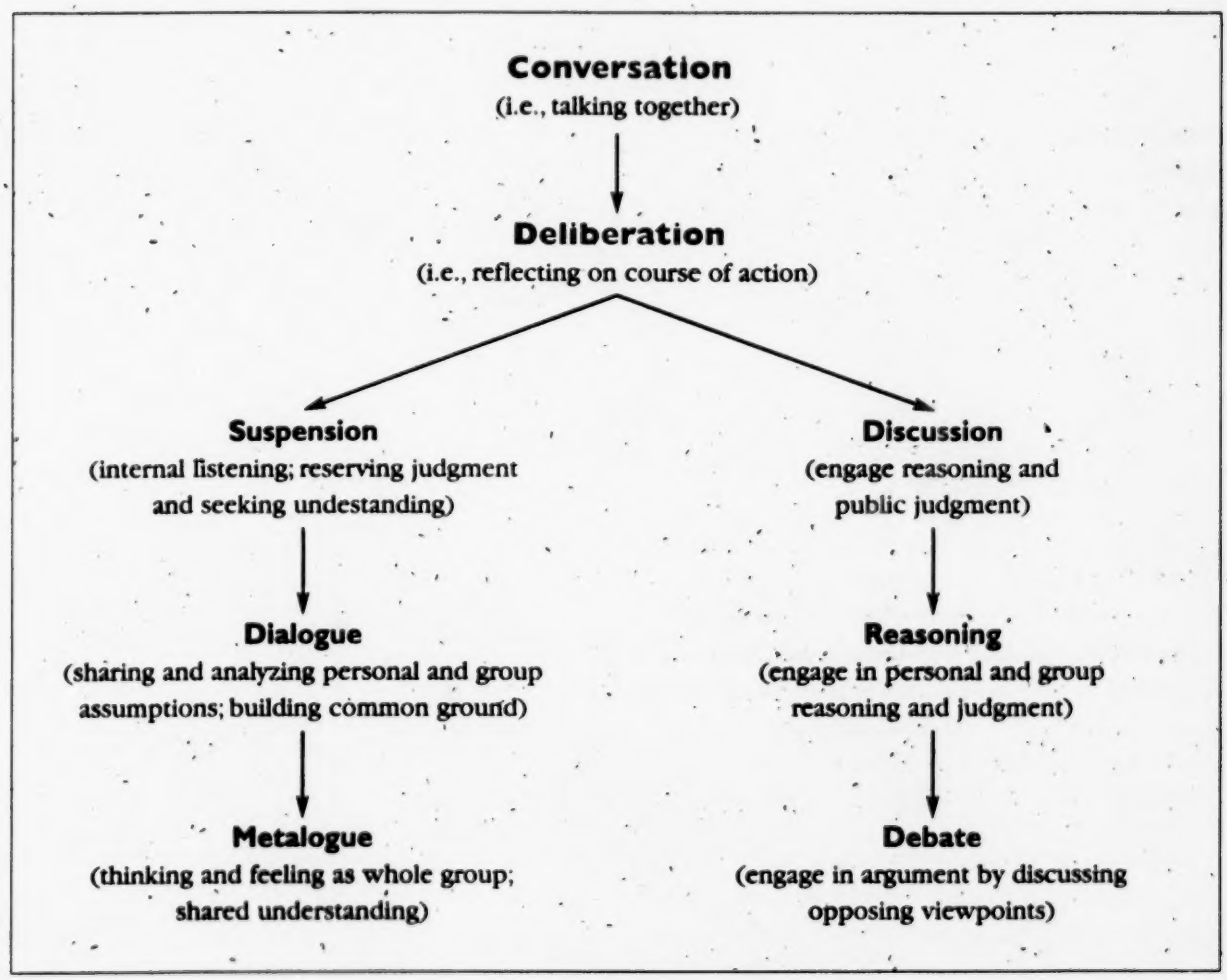
These different types of dialogue and outcomes are arranged in the table on the previous page. We use the terms "inclusive," "divergent," "convergent," and "critical" to define the outer limits of a range across which different types of dialogue may be found, depending on whether an array of ideas or unity is sought.



The "inclusive-critical" dimension shows whether the dialogue focuses on building understanding, a sense of belonging, and inclusiveness, or whether it focuses on understanding of content such as a concept or a position on an issue.

The divergent-convergent dimension shows whether the dialogue aims at creating a diversity of ideas, opinions, or expressions, or whether it seeks to narrow ideas down toward a single conclusion. For example, **dialogue as conversation** tends to be divergent, where multiple beliefs, values, and points of view are encouraged and nurtured in order to develop mutual understanding and positive relationships. Conversation is inclusive. It seeks to create a climate of support where participants feel safe in expressing their beliefs.

Dialogue as instruction focuses on the development of knowledge or conceptual understanding. This form of dialogue is often referred to as Socratic Dialogue, where one person in the dialogue seeks to lead others toward a conclusion through the use of give-and-take questioning. Unlike other forms of instruction, dialogue requires greater participation and engagement of the learner. As a result, it is often more motivating than traditional forms of teaching such as direct instruction or lecturing (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991).



Each form of dialogue serves a different purpose, yet they are all interrelated and require certain conditions to be successful. For example, if your purpose is to build understanding and relations, then you would likely begin with "dialogue as conversation," to reflect inward on participants' beliefs and assumptions.

This form of dialogue can only occur when participants assume roles of equal status. For example, see the box below.

A key thing to keep in mind is the difference between dialogue, as we define it here, and conversation. The following box displays the "natural" progression of a conversation. Note how conversation can lead to divergent outcomes.

The following two scenarios illustrate how individuals engaged in conversation make choices that can lead to unproductive discussion and debate or to a dialogue that can enhance understanding and the potential for collective decisionmaking and action.

A school staff sits in a circle having a conversation about how children learn best. In Scenario One, the conversation begins by an initial sharing of personal information that quickly moves toward debate.

SCENARIO ONE

Martin: I began teaching 25 years ago and, during that time, I have found students learn best when the teacher has clear control of instruction. Too often I have seen students fall behind because there was no clearly defined authority in the classroom. Students should not be allowed to talk or move freely around the classroom without regard to the authority of the teacher.

Sandra: *(Sandra thinks to herself: Martin will never change; he doesn't believe students can do anything without being told by the teacher. I can't let this pass by.)* How are students to learn responsibility unless they are given the chance to assume some authority for their own learning? In my classroom, students choose various learning centers based on their interests.

Anna: I agree with Martin. If we don't directly control learning in the classroom, students will slip between the cracks and we will come under fire from the community.

Mike: *(Thinks to self: I am not sure how students learn best, but being a first-year teacher, I am keeping my mouth shut.)*

Sandra fails to catch herself and dives right into a discussion with Martin. Once down the road of discussion, Anna finds herself siding with Martin and a debate begins. If emotions run high, one can imagine a staff conversation becoming quickly polarized around who is right, with little understanding being achieved.

In Scenario Two, Sandra takes more time to reflect on how she will respond and what she wants to achieve in the group. The supportive tone of the conversation opens up the dialogue, and Mike shares his thoughts.

SCENARIO TWO

Martin: I began teaching 25 years ago and, during that time, I have found students learn best when the teacher has clear control of instruction. Too often I have seen students fall behind because there was no defined authority in the classroom. Students should not be allowed to talk or move freely around the classroom without regard to the authority of the teacher.

Sandra: *(Sandra thinks to herself: Martin will never change; he doesn't believe students can do anything without being told by the teacher. I am really reacting to his comments; I need to suspend judgment and try to understand where he is coming from.)* I have seen classrooms where kids seem to be out of control, talking and moving around without purpose. But I have also seen classrooms where students and teachers move freely but with clear purpose and where plenty of learning takes place. In my classroom, I have scheduled project time where students work in teams.

Anna: *(Anna to self: I tend to agree with Martin. I wonder how Sandra controls students during project time? Maybe my fear of losing control leads me to believe like Mike.)* In my classroom, I like to know that each student is learning the skills they will need in order to be successful in the next grade. My job is to make sure they have learned.

Mike: *(Thinks to self: I am not sure how students learn best, but I feel there needs to be purpose and direction and that may vary with different students.)* I often struggle with how to best help students learn. Don't you feel there needs to be purpose and direction in student learning, and that may vary with different students?

Sandra reflects on her own thoughts and reactions to Martin. In the spirit of dialogue, she suspends judgment in favor of trying to understand Martin's point of view. Anna begins to reflect on why she agrees with Martin's approach to learning. Because Sandra, Anna, and Martin choose to slow down and examine their thoughts and assumptions, the conversation moves toward improved understanding of individual assumptions about learning. Because there is a genuine effort to listen and understand, Mike feels comfortable about sharing his point of view. If this dialogue were to continue, one can imagine a set of attitudes more conducive to positive, collective change than what one might expect in Scenario One. Scenario Two could lead to what Schein (1993) calls metalogue.

TALKING TEACHERS

In a study of successful multiage educational programs, Miller (1991) describes how staff and parents at Concrete Elementary School began their efforts to improve student learning by engaging in various forms of dialogue, beginning with *conversation* and extending to other forms as staff and parents explored multiple learning approaches through reading, classroom observation, workshops, and informal discussions. As different groups of parents and teachers explored instructional approaches such as cooperative learning and multiple intelligences they brought their ideas back to the school where they were debated in order to determine the best fit with the community and school. As instructional ideas matured and began to take shape, other concerns such as scheduling emerged. Teams formed to inquire into how other schools of similar demographics planned and organized their instructional day.

This is not to say that discussion does not have a place in group work. However, for discussion to be successful, it needs to grow from a level of trust and openness and reflect the collective interests of the group as opposed to the interests of individuals or subgroups pushing their own agendas. If we take a path to dialogue rather than discussion, what then does the path of dialogue look like? What is each step of the way?

V. STAGES OF DIALOGUE

Schein (1993) has found that the path of dialogue speeds up the development of group cohesion because it creates psychological safety, nurturing individual and group change. However, for dialogue to be successful, individuals must be motivated with a desire to work together. This desire must be strong enough to overcome the competitive hunger to win over others or prove one is right. Dialogue evolves through four general stages whether in formal organizations such as schools, corporations, and labor unions or in less formal situations such as rural community groups, neighborhoods, or among people simply interested in learning about each other. Each stage can be characterized as an increasingly conscious environment of inquiry (Isaacs, 1993).

According to Schein (1993), helping to maintain the personal focus by drawing on it to illustrate important points can be accomplished by the facilitator. The facilitator has one of the most important roles to play in creating a dialogue. Let's look at this role more closely.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Stages and Characteristics of Successful Dialogue Groups

Stage	Common Pattern	Commonly Held Feelings	Desired Outcomes
Invitation and Initiation to the Dialogue Process	A group of 15 to 40 agree to sit in a circle and participate in a conversation about their diverse perspectives and desire for improved experience.	There is interest and curiosity, often with an expectation about goal and purpose.	Decision to persist and continue the dialogue.
Instability and Conflict	Climate becomes unstable as diverse attitudes and assumptions emerge. Extreme views get stated and defined. Subgroups form and defend positions and beliefs. Individuals may seek to control or direct the group.	Lack of clear direction and purpose result in frustration, anxiety, and annoyance. Anger may bubble up as assumptions are questioned or challenged.	Individuals begin asking themselves: What is this I am hearing? What does it mean? What is my position or attitude? What can I learn if I slow down, suspend judgment, and listen?
Suspension	Individuals slow down their reactions and pay attention to their thoughts. The group begins to take on a collective approach to inquiry.	Feelings of trust toward one another and the process emerge. Increased feelings of coherence and sense of community are felt.	People learn to suspend judgment and listen to their thoughts. Tacit assumptions and perceptions become malleable.
Collective Exploration	Individuals and the group move beyond blockages and limitations. The group is able to think and act collectively, taking on new areas of uncertainty.	Feelings of collective energy, well-being, and a spirit of group inquiry have developed.	People develop a group consciousness and new levels of intelligence, creativity, and energy.

The Role of the Facilitator

A major goal of facilitation is to set the stage for dialogue so participants catch themselves at the point of deliberation, suspend their reactions, and head down the road toward productive dialogue.

At the MIT Dialogue Project, the facilitator plays a crucial role in starting up and sustaining a dialogue group over time. When starting up a group, the following activities have been found helpful (Isaacs, 1993):

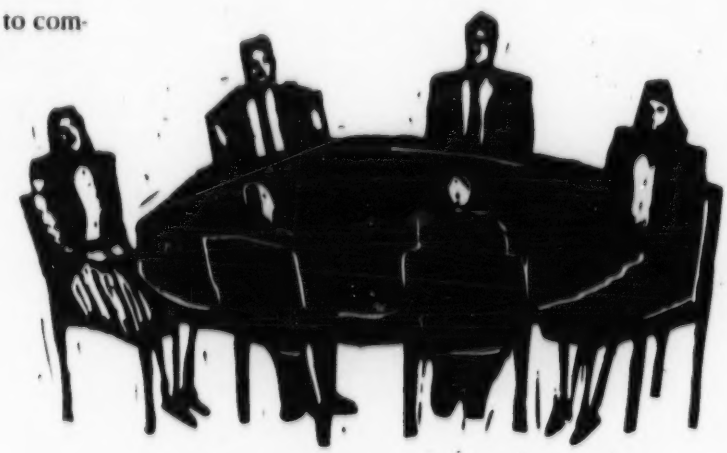
- Organize the physical space to be as nearly a circle as possible. This helps create a sense of equality.
- Introduce the concept of dialogue and ask people to reflect on any dialogue-like experiences they may have had.
- Have people share with their neighbor the characteristics of that experience.
- Ask group members to share what made for good communications during those experiences and record these on a flip chart.
- Ask the group to reflect on these characteristics by having each person in turn talk about his or her reactions.
- Let the conversation flow naturally once everyone has commented (this requires one-and-a-half to two hours or more).
- Intervene as necessary to clarify or elucidate.
- Close the session by asking everyone to comment in whatever way they choose.

FACILITATOR: NOT LEADER

The role of facilitator is not one of leader or expert. Role status does not give any particular group or individual special rights or privileges. Being placed in an expert role is counterproductive because it redirects responsibility from participants to the facilitator. Further, expert roles divert the group away from developing cohesion and collective inquiry and understanding.

Brown's (1995) suggestions to facilitators create the initial conditions that contribute to a successful dialogue:

- Send readings in advance that can put people in a frame of mind receptive to dialogue
- Engage individuals in reflective writing
- Create a setting that is calm, conducive to reflection, and away from the fray of daily activities and routines
- Organize individuals around a table or circle that gives them a sense of shared leadership where they can see, listen, and be heard more completely



The Role of the Participants

How individuals choose to behave also contributes to the success of a dialogue. Since dialogue differs from many other forms of group work, it is helpful to provide some guidelines for deepening participant understanding of the dialogue process. Brown (1995, p. 162) offers the following guidelines to help participants think and respond in ways that contribute to a successful dialogue:

- Speak from the heart and the moment, and from your own experience; listen from the community, from the collective
- Listen without thinking about responding
- Listen for information, not confirmation
- Begin thinking in terms of "I wonder ... " or "Where I am on this issue now is ... "
- Allow for silence; it may mean people are thinking, considering
- Suspend assumptions and consider alternative ones that might be just as useful
- Assume that the ideas and observations of others come from a desire to contribute
- Expect that ideas build upon each other even if they don't link logically one to the other
- Remember that difference of opinion can be helpful, because it sharpens our understanding
- Move away from conclusions and toward observations; notice what you are noticing, and what meaning you are making of it
- Sometimes in communication, less is better, and slowly is fine

Isaacs (1993) presents a similar, but less detailed, list:

- Suspend assumptions and certainties
- Observe the observer
- Listen to your listening
- Slow down the inquiry
- Be aware of thought
- Befriend polarization

Both Brown's (1995) and Isaacs' (1993) suggestions focus on self-awareness, being able to stand back and observe and listen to one's self. Isaacs especially believes cases of polarized thinking provide opportunities to explore our assumptions. These opportunities show us certainties in our assumptions about experience that cut us off from further inquiry and understanding.

Sometimes during dialogue it is helpful to use graphic images as well as verbal language to develop deeper understanding and clarify individual and group thinking. Brown (1995) asked a group she was working with to draw pictures of their individual visions of the group as a learning community. By sharing their pictures, individuals and the group had the opportunity to combine words with pictures, thus deepening their individual and collective awareness.

Isaacs (1993) describes how an impasse between steelworkers and managers cleared up when the dialogue facilitator graphically mapped the conflict pattern and posted it on a wall. Participants were then given the opportunity to reflect on the map and decide whether to continue the pattern. They agreed to end it, but old patterns die hard. Interestingly, the same conflict appeared again, but this time, Isaacs says, "several in the group pointed (literally) to the map, and then to the people; it dawned on them and others that they were caught in the same back-eddy of the stream of thought" (p. 36).

Successful dialogue reflects a willingness to partner and cooperate in the face of likely disagreement, confusion, failure, and misunderstanding. Persisting in the face of such discord requires mutual respect, trust, and concern. Burbules (1993) offers three rules he has found to be essential if dialogue is to be successful. These guidelines suggest that all parties to a dialogue need to play an active role in order for the process to work.

The Rule of Participation

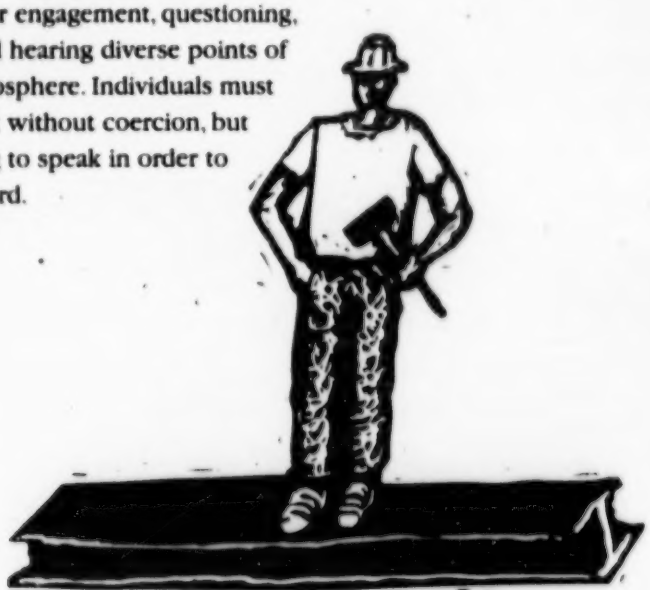
If dialogue is to be edifying or instructive, it requires the participation of all participants. This means there must be opportunities for engagement, questioning, trying out new ideas, and hearing diverse points of view in an inclusive atmosphere. Individuals must not only be free to speak without coercion, but they must also be willing to speak in order to move the dialogue forward.

The Rule of Commitment

Participants must be willing to persist in the face of an uncertainty of direction. They must be willing to persist in the face of differences of opinion and beliefs and seek to understand others' points of view, thoughts, and feelings and the experiences that underlie them. They must also have faith in a process whereby one is willing to disclose one's underlying reasons, feelings, and motivations when asked. For example, this might mean that a parent raises a question with a teacher who seems intolerant of parents who question teachers' authority. This could also apply to teachers who raise questions with the school principal.

The Rule of Reciprocity

Because dialogue is essentially about relations, all participants must appreciate the importance of maintaining quality communication and the conditions that sustain it. Communication must be reciprocal, where mutual trust, respect, and concern, regardless of one's position or status, typify the conditions of the dialogue (Burbules, 1993, pp. 80–83).



VI. WHEN DIALOGUE DOES NOT WORK

What do you see as the most significant features of successful dialogue? What would happen if they were not present or flourishing?

What else is likely to interfere with the development of a dialogue?

Why Dialogues Fail

If the conditions for success discussed earlier do not prevail, what happens? If an equal playing field is not created, will dialogue fail? Below we look at obstacles to building successful dialogue.

The following table presents behaviors that can lead to negative results for each of the types of dialogue. Interestingly, each condition reflects an extreme or excess of a desired behavior.

For example, in **dialogue as conversation,** self-expression and disclosure are important behaviors that help develop understanding. However, when they become excessive, they reduce self-reflection and can become self-serving. They may impede opportunities for everyone to be heard.

Dialogues break down when communications and relations cease to be cooperative and equal and when participants fail to act with commitment. For example, differences of authority and status create a restrictive environment where people do not feel free to talk openly and honestly with one another. Breakdown can also occur when people go through the motions of dialogue in a mechanical way, talking and acting appropriately, but without deep emotional commitment to share their beliefs or try to understand those of others. Petit (cited in Burbules, 1993) summarizes the causes of breakdown as, "not taking seriously what one says oneself, what the other says, or what constitutes the object of the discussion" (p. 145). Marcondes (cited in Burbules, 1993) also describes factors that can bring a dialogue to a standstill:

> Manipulation, misinterpretation of intentions, opposition to goals in communication, contradiction between divergent aims in performing speech acts ..., interruptions ....As if in communication we really had to decipher and interpret some secret intention of our interlocutor, whose objective is to try to hide something from us or mislead us by what he says (p. 145).

Marcondes suggests that the suspicion of a hidden agenda is as destructive to the development of understanding as actually having a hidden agenda. Parties to a dialogue need to enter the conversation with intentions of honest and equitable communication. Of course, personal and organizational histories can hamper such positive intentions. For example, where rural teachers have experienced a succession of administrators, each with an agenda for change, suspicion and skepticism develop, making open dialogue difficult (Miller, 1991). Seldom do efforts to change schools begin with an open dialogue about the purpose, direction, or nature of the changes. The Annenberg Rural Challenge may be one of the first national efforts to reform education by requiring that all constituents of the community have a voice: parents, students, teachers, administrators, businesses, and so forth.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Conditions in Dialogue that Can Lead to Negative Results

Dialogue Type	Conditions that Can Lead to Negative Results
Conversation	When the conditions of self-expression and disclosure become excessive and anything can be said, but not questioned.
Inquiry	In the effort to find the "right" solution or answer, individuals can rush too quickly toward agreement, thus damaging conditions that make dialogue work.
Debate	Debate can become too aggressive and competitive, thus hindering conditions that could lead to new insight and damaging relations. Can also become direct and confrontational.
Instruction	Can become too controlling and manipulative, thus restricting open investigation. For example, when an individual is singled out and subjected to a rigorous questioning in order to obtain the right answer.

(Adapted from Burbules, 1993, pp. 124-128.)

Obstacles to Daily Dialogue

In order to make community dialogues work, we must first overcome obstacles to speaking up. In more formal settings such as schools, community organizations, or businesses, the social dynamics are different from those of neighbors talking over the fence. They are affected by:

- Power and status relationships
- Institutional structures
- Competition for resources
- Role hierarchy

You may be hesitant to speak in a large group or to engage in casual conversation with your boss. Yet, these formal settings are places in which we vitally need to speak to one another. Conflicts such as labor-management disputes, teacher strikes, friction over how to best serve students, and over environmental and economic development needs arise in part because factions evolve and become isolated from one another. Most often such conflicts begin with histories and assumptions that have hardened into polarized positions. Opposing parties debate the merits of their respective cases.

VII. WHERE DO WE START?

First, make a list of people you would like to invite to a dialogue.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12

How will you meet? What will you do? Your first steps might be to go through this workbook together. Then the large group may want to break down into smaller groups and begin discussion.

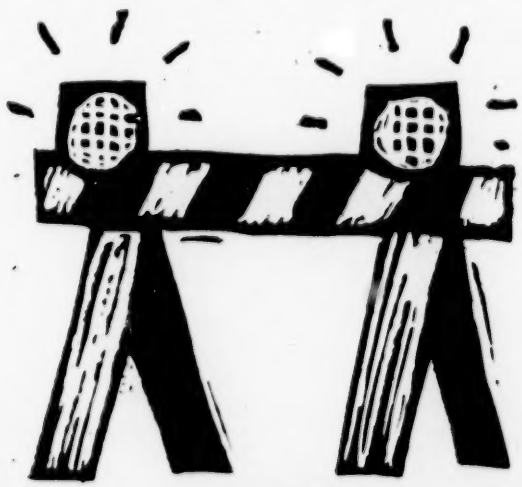
How would you choose the topic for discussion?

33

Where would you meet?

How would you try to avoid some of the obstacles to dialogue?

The following pages are designed as a log in which you can record your dialogue sessions and reflect on what you are learning, how you are speaking, and whether relationships are forming. After each session, think about these kinds of accomplishments. After the conclusion of all the sessions, reflect on the wider, more far-reaching accomplishments. What kind of foundation for ongoing action has been laid? What are you and your dialogue partners prepared to create?



Dialogue Log

35

APPENDIX: DIALOGUE CENTERS

Study Circles

Study Circles is an organization sponsored by the Topsfield Foundation. Study Circles are highly organized groups of 5–15 people who attend a series of meetings during which they engage in dialogues about locally significant issues. The organization is an informal, practical, and effective way to promote adult learning and social change, rooted in civic movements of the 19th century. All involvement is voluntary and participatory. Study Circles:

- Assist participants in confronting challenging issues and in making difficult choices
- Engage citizens in public and organizational concerns, bringing the wisdom of ordinary citizens to bear on difficult issues
- Promote cooperation and participation
- Create small-group democracy in action, based on equal participation
- Enable collaborative efforts to address public problems
- Define citizenship broadly and actively

The one defined goal of Study Circles is deliberation, though circles often lead to political or social action. Results of dialogue embody the idea that to understand is to act (Study Circles Resource Center, 1995).

Study Circles may deal with a range of issues including community development/revitalization, race relations, community leadership, education, crime and violence, substance abuse, and homelessness. They may also concern themselves with national and international issues such as the death penalty, foreign policy (in conjunction with Deliberative Democracy Network of East Central Europe), abortion rights (in conjunction with the Common Ground Network for Life and Choice), labor disputes (in conjunction with the George Meany Center for Labor Studies and the AFL-CIO Department of Education), and sustainable agriculture.

Kettering Foundation

Another organization that promotes community dialogues is the Kettering Foundation, which operates on the belief that citizens must set directions for policy and work collaboratively. Public ownership and support can be achieved by getting people talking. Kettering defines the goals of its dialogues as follows:

- To encourage people to learn about public issues and to grapple with choices about how to address them
- To help people identify and understand the deep concerns that underlie public issues
- To move the community toward common ground about how to move ahead on issues
- To engage people in a way that is meaningful to them
- To offer a way of looking at complex issues that does not try to oversimplify them into "yes" or "no" questions
- To empower people to talk about and act on public issues
- To strengthen problem-solving skills among citizens and their leaders
- To improve the quality of public talk in your community
- To make sure that public discussions reflect a broad range of views

Kettering's goals are similar to Study Circles' in that they promote discussion, universal participation, and deepening understandings as opposed to specific actions or outcomes. Kettering differs from Study Circles in that their process of creating dialogue relies on an initial community group that is responsible for outlining and writing up topics for discussion. This group is responsible for what Kettering terms "framing" the issue. While they work on a broad range of local, national, and international issues, Kettering dialogues:

- Should be of concern to a broad spectrum of community members
- Should require choices but not have clear answers
- Should require collaborative effort to be effectively addressed
- May be those that could not be resolved in the past and need a new approach.

Some specific issues for which groups have used the issues framework approach include:

- Local/National: rural development; environmental education; adult literacy; state taxation
- International: The Chilean Democratic Movement

National Issues Forum (NIF)

A third group, which works under the auspices of the Kettering Foundation, is the National Issues Forum (NIF). They work to:

- Promote democratic politics with the belief that democracy is not influencing officials, but rather making tough decisions about what we as people should do. Real public influence lies in the public's ability to make choices about purposes and directions for their communities and country.
- Promote public forums that are more dialogue than debate, allowing people to weigh all options for action as well as views of others. Allow people to explore and test ideas, not just score points. Remove emotions associated with politics.
- Foster economic development. A goal of the forums is economic development, but the NIF believes that "a healthy civic life generates a healthy economy."

The NIF also has a defined goal of deliberation: "The deliberative process involves people listening to one another as opposed to a speaker; making choices as opposed to gathering information; maintaining civility and a diversity of views. The process includes broad participation, a willingness to consider opposing arguments, and an openness to reexamining initial opinions. Progress is made in clarifying various points of view and in bringing out pros, cons, and trade-offs of different approaches. The focus is on public themes and values evoked by an issue.

Dialogues do not elect anyone to office and do not advance any special interests, but they do have a political effect of the most basic kind. They create a public and turn private individuals into public citizens. They help set directions for governments and build a common ground of shared purposes for public action. The public makes choices, and these choices make public policy by defining what the public considers to be in the public interest of a democracy. These choices must grow out of reflection and a shared sense of political reality and are sound when people accept the consequences of their actions.

NIF deliberations are designed to help transform ever-changing mass opinions into more integrated and shared judgments.

Each year the NIF focuses on three issues and publishes information books to frame discussions on those issues. The NIF has covered:

- Local/National:
  - — Drug abuse
  - — Racism
  - — Education
  - — Environmental protection
  - — Community development
  - — Poverty
  - — Illiteracy
  - — Domestic violence
  - — Alcoholism (also a part of international programs)
  - — Economic development (also a part of international programs)
- International:
  - — Regaining the edge in the world economy
  - — International conflicts (Soviet-U.S., Afghanistan, Arab-Israeli, Southern Africa, Central America, Cambodia)

REFERENCES

Berlin, B.M., & Cienkus, R.C. (1989). Size: The ultimate educational issue? *Education and Urban Society, 21*(2), 228-231.

Bohm, D., & Peat, D.F. (1991). Transforming the culture through dialogue. *The Utne Reader, 44*, 82-83.

Bohm, D., Factor, D., & Garrett, P. (1991). *Dialogue: A proposal.* Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved July 3, 2000, from the World Wide Web: world.std.com/~lo/bohm/0000.html

Brown, J. (1995). Dialogue: Capacities and stories. In S. Chawla & J. Renesch (Eds.), *Learning organizations: Developing cultures for tomorrow's workplace* (pp. 153-166). Portland, OR: Productivity Press.

Burbules, N.C. (1993). *Dialogue in teaching: Theory and practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Goldenberg, C.N., & Gallimore, R. (1991, April). *Teaching and learning in a new key: The instructional conversation.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Isaacs, W.N. (1993). Taking flight: Dialogue, collective thinking, and organizational learning. *Organizational Dynamics, 22*(2), 24-39.

Miller, B.A. (1991). *Distress and survival: Rural schools, education, and the importance of community.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Miller, B.A., & Hull, J.L. (1991). *Overcoming professional isolation in small, rural schools.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Schein, E.H. (1993). On dialogue, culture, and organizational learning. *Organizational Dynamics, 22*(2), 40-51.

Study Circles Resource Center. (1995). *Education: How can schools and communities work together to meet the challenge?* Pomfret, CT: Author.

Thayer-Bacon, B.J. (1996). Relational qualities between selves and communities: Implications for schools. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education, 2*(3), 283-303.

ORDERING PUBLICATIONS FROM NWREL

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Document Reproduction Service
101 S.W. Main, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204-3297
1-800-547-6339, ext. 519
E-mail: products@nwrel.org
www.nwrel.org

Shipping and Handling

- Orders are processed and shipped within seven days.
- Rush orders are processed and shipped within 24 hours with an additional 25 percent processing fee plus any additional freight charges, such as UPS air or 2nd day service.
- Orders under $15 *include* fourth-class postage. To upgrade to first-class postage, add $1.50 per item.
- Orders over $15 *include* UPS ground delivery within the continental United States.
- Orders from outside the United States and its possessions require advance payment in U.S. currency plus an additional 25 percent for postage.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE